



**Volusia County-Daytona Beach NAACP
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE**

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August 6, 2011

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Honorable Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

Digital information and high speed access to the Internet has revolutionized the way the majority of Americans live. Communication which once relied on mail service and land-lines now relies on cellular and mobile devices, which enable communication on the go via voice and data services. This technological shift has changed the way individuals connect with the world and access information.

Unfortunately, not all Americans have access to digital communication. Only around 60 percent of American households have broadband access in their homes. Estimates show that the percentage of households using broadband Internet would be higher, but infrastructure problems limit access. Rural areas across the United States have very limited access to broadband through wired sources. Over 50 million Americans live in geographic regions which are classified as rural. Such a significant portion of the population living in areas that receive very limited high-speed Internet access creates a divide between the haves and the have-nots of the digital age. Many of those without access to broadband in rural areas belong to underserved groups like African Americans.

Florida has a large rural population, with nearly two million people living in rural communities across the state according to the Census Bureau. Of the two million rural residents, a sizable percentage is comprised of African American and Hispanics. Therefore, it is essential that all Floridians in rural areas have access to broadband services to fully integrate into the digital age.

AT&T's acquisition of T-Mobile in the wireless communication industry will allow rural communities in Florida and across the United States to gain broadband access. AT&T's plan to bring mobile broadband in the form of very fast 4G LTE service to 97 percent of Americans is perhaps the most significant development in broadband access to date. The plan will allow 55 million more people to participate in the digital age through reliable and affordable service. As a result, nearly all rural communities in Florida and across America will have access to mobile broadband.

Rural communities will benefit from connection to the digital age and create ripple effects which can help our leaders confront unique socio-economic challenges. Broadband allows individuals to consume limitless information in the most efficient way. This has direct impacts on education in rural communities. School aged children in rural school districts will benefit from better digital literacy rates and will have opportunities to supplement their learning experiences in the classroom. This will better prepare them for the needs of the workforce and for experiences in higher education.

Attainment of higher education in many rural areas lags behind the national average. While digital literacy provides the skills students need to excel in higher learning programs, enhancing mobile broadband coverage expands the opportunities for individuals in rural communities receiving education. High-speed Internet allows the classroom experience to be received in homes and workplaces throughout the country. Many universities offer online degree and certificate programs in addition to virtual courses. Many rural communities in Florida are several miles away from universities making attending college for non-traditional students an extremely complicated endeavor. With mobile broadband, students can receive instruction and earn degrees without having to travel significant distances.

As President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) local chapter in Volusia County –Daytona Beach, I have made it my mission to fight for equality and fairness. Understanding the issues facing African Americans, minorities, and underserved rural communities, I am convinced that mobile broadband can solve many problems.

AT&T's deal to purchase T-Mobile is vital to the interests of rural African American communities. In order to bridge the digital gap, geographical divides must be bridged to make sure everyone is connected and has access to broadband services. To help all underserved groups and people in rural areas achieve the goal of equal and universal access to high speed Internet, we ask that the Commission approve the merger.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cynthia Slater".

Cynthia Slater, President
Volusia County-Daytona Beach NAACP

